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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. President Putin's Announcement

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media headlined Russian President Vladimir Putin's invitation to Hamas leaders to visit Russia. Putin was quoted as saying that Russia never considered Hamas a terrorist organization and that they were elected by their people in democratic, legitimate elections. The media claimed that Putin's announcement contradicts a statement issued two weeks ago by the Quartet, of which Russia is a member. The reports in the media emphasized that Putin's words were the first crack in the united international front against the Hamas and cited different Israeli officials' concerns that this would lead to more countries recognizing Hamas. Israel Radio interviewed Minister Meir Shitrit, who described Putin's announcement as an international scandal and a stab in Israel's back. The media quoted Assistant Secretary of State David Welch as saying that Russia is

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a member of the Quartet and that the U.S. expects any meeting between Russian officials and Palestinian representatives to comply with Quartet decisions. The American response was described by the media as moderate and cautious. Israel Radio reported that Hamas leader Khaled Mashal accepted Russia's invitation and also announced that he would visit Jordan in the near future.

All media reported that while FM Livni was in a meeting with National Security Advisor Stephan Hadley, President George Bush entered the meeting and joined them for thirty minutes. Livni was quoted as saying after the meeting that the conversation was interesting and that important issues were raised.

Israel Radio this morning cited a Qatari newspaper report that Qatar's Foreign Minister had a phone conversation with Foreign Minister Livni regarding Hamas's victory in the P.A. elections.

Maariv reported that Shimon Peres was scheduled to meet P.A. Chairman Abu Mazen in Jordan but, in an effort to present a united front against Hamas, Acting Prime Minister Olmert instructed Peres to cancel the meeting.

Leading media reported that Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO's Secretary General, said that Israel is currently not a candidate for membership in NATO. Minister of Defense Shaul Mofaz is leading the Israeli delegation to the NATO meeting in Sicily and is expected to deliver a forceful speech today regarding the Iranian issue.

The Jerusalem Post reported that IDF officers from the

Northern Command have warned this week that if international pressure on Syrian President Bashar Assad continues he might decide to attack Israel.

All media reported on President Bush's press conference in which he revealed that U.S. security forces have foiled a planned al-Qaeda terror attack on the US BANK Tower in Los Angeles in October 2002.

All media reported that Egypt's military attach to the P.A. was abducted on Thursday by two masked men believed to be members of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade.

Leading media reported that 3 Palestinians militants were killed by IDF troops in two separate incidents in the Gaza Strip.

Ha'aretz reported that the World Jewish Congress (WJC) held its biannual gathering in Jerusalem this week. The WJC has launched a campaign against Iran following Iran's nuclear crisis and anti-Semitic statements.

POLLS:

Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll found: Should Israel part from the majority of the Palestinians by unilateral disengagement? 59 percent support unilateral steps; 37 percent oppose.

1. President Putin's Announcement:

Summary:

Territories correspondent Arnon Regular wrote in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "Within 24 hours after Hamas won the Palestinian elections, its leaders had identified the Russian-Chinese axis, as well as a few European countries, as the place to concentrate its efforts to soften the stringent conditions for acceptance by the international community that are currently being set by the United States, Israel, Egypt and Jordan. Nevertheless, even Hamas was surprised to receive a direct invitation to its leaders from Putin."

Chief economic editor Sever Plotzker wrote in a page-one article of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "President Putin, disciple of the KGB, dreams of returning Russia to meddling in the Middle East. For this purpose he is extending a hand to the darkest, most benighted, most dangerous forces in the Arab world. This is a bloody pact: Putin's hands are soiled with Chechen blood, and Hamas's hands with Israeli blood."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "This is a Russian measure that is more reminiscent of a Soviet measure from the old days: Putin spotted a rare, enormous opportunity to turn into the main player in the Middle East once again, the only one who can deliver the goods and mediate between the parties. He ignores the fact that it is a dirty game and that he has scored a goal after the referee called half-time. He is the only one dribbling in this game, but meanwhile this dribbling is giving everyone a headache."

Block Quotes:

I. "Welcome Bear Hug"

Territories correspondent Arnon Regular wrote in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (February 10): "Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that he would be willing to meet with Hamas leaders did not come as a complete surprise to Hamas, which is currently on a drive to obtain international legitimacy for its future government. Within 24 hours after Hamas won the Palestinian elections, its leaders had identified the Russian-Chinese axis, as well as a few European countries, as the place to concentrate its efforts to soften the stringent conditions for acceptance by the international community that are currently being set by the United States, Israel, Egypt and Jordan. Nevertheless, even Hamas was surprised to receive a direct invitation to its leaders from Putin.... Putin's invitation is evidence of the split in the international community, and Hamas is trying to exploit this split to soften the demands that it recognize Israel and accept existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.... Hamas' natural allies, Iran and Syria, have already promised to make up the shortfall should Western aid to the PA be cut off. But

Putin's invitation offers Hamas its best chance yet to improve its hand vis-a-vis the West."

II. "Putin's Bloody Pact"

Chief economic editor Sever Plotzker wrote in a page-one article of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 10): "The solution to the Palestinian problem, according to Hamas, is solely through jihad [holy war]; every Muslim, wherever he is, must join this holy war personally. It is with people who hold such opinions that the Russian president wishes to engage in constructive dialogue.... The invitation that Putin sent to Hamas is not only a slap in the face to Israel; it is also a disgrace for Russia. Has it learned nothing from the support of the Soviet Union for the Palestinian terror organizations in the past? Its Middle Eastern policy is filled with mistakes, failures and odd alliances, which ended in pushing Moscow out of every corner in the Middle East.... Nevertheless, President Putin, disciple of the KGB, dreams of returning Russia to meddling in the Middle East. For this purpose he is extending a hand to the darkest, most benighted, most dangerous forces in the Arab world. This is a bloody pact: Putin's hands are soiled with Chechen blood, and Hamas's hands with Israeli blood."

III. "The Soviet Union Returns"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 10): "Yesterday, Vladimir Putin shocked the entire world. Yesterday, the Soviet Union broke the worldwide alliance taking shape against Hamas. Just like in the good old days of the Cold War, only now it is much closer to us and also a good deal warmer. Yesterday could have been a day of accomplishments and celebrations, with Tzippi Livni receiving honor in Washington that is reserved only for royalty and nobility. The American president gave her an entire half hour and the entire administration applauded her enthusiastically. And then, just before the ending credits, out came Putin, inviting Hamas leaders to Moscow. A cold shower in the middle of winter, which threatens to take apart everything that Olmert, Livni, Weiss and Solana have been building for weeks.... This is a Russian measure that is more reminiscent of a Soviet measure from the old days: Putin spotted a rare, enormous opportunity to turn into the main player in the Middle East once again, the only one who can deliver the goods and mediate between the parties. He ignores the fact that it is a dirty game and that he has scored a goal after the referee called half-time. He is the only one dribbling in this game, but meanwhile this dribbling is giving everyone a headache."

12. Mideast:

Summary

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel must exhibit unflinching determination when it comes to existential affairs, even if the harm done to Palestinians runs deep. To this end, Israel needs international support. The Israeli strategy must lead to a split in Hamas such that the pragmatists in the organization forgo the idea of destroying Israel."

Block Quotes

"Does Israel Have a Strategy?"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 10): "It would be best if a dialogue were to develop between the majority of the Palestinian public, which seeks normalcy, and Hamas. This dialogue will not ensue if Israel continues to send money to the PA as if nothing has happened. Israel must exhibit unflinching determination when it comes to existential affairs, even if the harm done to Palestinians runs deep. To this end, Israel needs international support. The Israeli strategy must lead to a split in Hamas such that the pragmatists in the organization forgo the idea of destroying Israel, just as Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization did in their day. If Hamas refuses to capitulate and keeps following its same line, Israel will become embroiled in a violent and harsh conflict. If it fails in this conflict, the

deterioration will be widespread, and spill over into
Jordan too."
JONES